

Free Thought and Catholicism

REV. A. POWER, S.J., M.A.

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ONE of the facts about the Catholic Church which must strike every observer is the intense hostility to her system, her teachings, and her methods that has existed in all ages of her history and especially in more recent times. Since the wave of scepticism which began to sweep over the world about 400 years ago infected men's minds, and a system of so-called Rationalism began to assert itself strongly and to strike deep roots in the intellectual world, a certain section of mankind has been engaged in a fierce and deadly struggle with that method of thought towards the problem of life which we call Catholicism.

ANTAGONISM TO THE CHURCH

Catholicism (or the Catholic religion) includes three things, a system of philosophy, a code of morality, and a method of worship; to all of which the modern infidel mind is intensely hostile. In fact, we can hardly conceive two modes of thought more diametrically opposed than that of the Free-thinker and Catholicism. The one shakes off all shackles and boasts that he is free to think as he pleases on all the fundamental problems of the universe; such as the existence and attributes of God, free-will, life after death, the meaning of sin, the question of a Divine revelation. The Catholic considers that on all these great problems he has found a solution which commands the assent of his intellect so fully that he is just as much at rest with regard to them as he is with regard to the doctrine of the solar system or the circulation of the blood.

The so called Free-thinker refuses to recognize any binding or constraining force in tradition or the authority of others. His attitude is: "I want to see and examine for myself. I accept nothing which I cannot verify."

Now, such a man is bitterly opposed to the Catholic Church because he conceives of a Roman Catholic as one who accepts all his religious doctrines on the authority of others: who believes a thing because he is told to believe:

as one who is either forbidden to examine the foundations of his belief or is afraid to do so.

Your Free-thinker, if he is virulent (and he often is) will conceive and express a very extraordinary picture of the state of poor, benighted Catholics. According to him they are a set of unfortunate and deluded folk, who are groaning under an intolerable intellectual despotism, which has its headquarters in Rome and its chief mouthpiece and exponent in the Pope. This intellectual tyranny, which holds so large a part of mankind in its grasp, is extraordinarily powerful in its organization. Through some strange sorcery it numbers among its devoted adherents many of the brightest intellects and most irreproachable characters in the history of the world. Poets like Dante and Francis Thompson; philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Descartes, Pascal; scientists in endless array from Roger Bacon to Mendel and Pasteur; statesmen of the type of Sir Thomas More; generals and educated men of every class and rank and position in life. And according to the Free-thinkers, all this vast array of human intellects and a whole fifth of the world's population, are the victims of a blind infatuation which has no parallel in the history of the world.

In order to make good their position the Free-thinkers set to work to show in detail the untenable nature of Catholic doctrines, and so we get the endless array of infidel publications which flood the market nowadays.

We stand here tonight gazing at this fierce battle between infidelity and Catholicism and ask ourselves the question: "What is the meaning of this incessant attack on the bulwarks of the Catholic Church!" "Why are so many men hostile to Catholicism?" There must be some deep reason for this antagonism.

Now, among the reasons which may be assigned, one certainly is this: that it is supposed that to accept the Catholic faith means the enslavement or fettering of the intellect. You give up your intellectual freedom once you submit to the yoke of the Catholic religion. That, of course, would be an intolerable sacrifice to make, and the system that imposes it is regarded as simply a bad system, which cannot be too strongly denounced.

Tyranny and despotism men have always hated. The

love of liberty is one of the noblest instincts implanted in the human heart, and the finest deeds that light up the pages of history have been done in defense of liberty. No sacrifice has been thought too great to shake off the yoke of a usurping tyrant.

INTELLECTUAL DESPOTISM

But if despotism in civil or domestic life is intolerable, how much more terrible will that despotism be that seeks to enchain the intellect: which attacks the very root of all our liberty, the liberty of the soul to seek and find the Truth.

"Stone walls do not a prison make,
Nor iron bars a cage."

provided a man be free in his soul. But suppose a person would seek to enslave my very soul, would creep into my bosom and set up his throne there, suppose he would try to dominate the very thoughts of my heart and the promptings of my conscience: how shall we regard such an attempt? Well, this is just what the Catholic Church is charged with doing. She enslaves not the body, but the souls of men: she fetters their intellects: she dictates to them not only what to do or avoid externally, but what to think and what to believe in the recesses of the soul.

Now, it is wise in matters of this kind to look to your definitions: we may therefore stop to ask ourselves the question, what does "Liberty of Thought" mean?

Freedom in general means that one can exercise some faculty or power without hindrance or obstacle that might impede such exercise; e. g., you are free to leave this hall if the doors are open and there is no policeman or other person who will bar your exit. But if you are locked up in Melbourne jail—you will not have liberty because obstacles of a serious kind hinder the exercise of your power of locomotion. Freedom of thought in the widest sense means that you can think as you please or hold any views you please on any subject whatsoever, without let or hindrance to limit or restrain the exercise of this thinking faculty. It is clear that the only hindrances of

which there is question here will be in the moral order, since we suppose that the mind is healthy and fit for thought.

WHAT CHECKS LIBERTY OF THOUGHT?

Now, what are the hindrances that might conceivably limit or check or circumscribe this liberty to think as you please? There are, I think, only two forces that can circumscribe this freedom of thought. They are: (1) In the first place, truth. Because, once you know the facts on any particular subject, you can think about that subject only in one way—you cannot hold any view you like about it. For instance, if I ask you whether it is night or day, usually you cannot have two opinions on the subject—your freedom to think as you please is limited by the fact that you know which it is.

(2) The second influence which may tend to limit our freedom of thought is passion or emotion, fear, hope, love, or despair, or some other movement of the soul that can blind the intellect or sway it to assent to something as true for which it has not sufficient evidence.

Now, with regard to the first point, apprehension of truth hinders the mind from indulging in any view it pleases and forming opinions at random. And this fact I would like to insist upon, since I regard it as the key or solution to most of the charges of fettering the intellect which are so freely hurled against Catholicism. I repeat, then: on a subject of which you know nothing you can form any views you please (which is, I suppose, the reason why people are so voluble on matters of which they are really ignorant). Once you know the facts, you are free to think only in one way; the truth has put a stop to the swaying of the mind just as the presence of iron holds the magnetized needle fixed in the one direction.

There are endless topics on which we can speculate at our own sweet will: Are there people in the planet Mars? Nobody knows; and so you can say yes and no, just as you like. Before Bass Strait was explored nobody knew whether Tasmania was a part of the Australian continent or not: there was complete freedom of thought on the subject. Once Bass and Flinders had achieved their daring

exploit and sailed through the Strait, such freedom of speculation ceased. Pardon me for multiplying examples on a matter that seems obvious, but it is an important point to insist upon.

RATIONAL LIBERTY INVOLVES RESTRAINT

Now, I ask, what sane man objects to having his liberty of thought checked or limited by discovering the truth? And it is thus and thus only that Catholicism sets limits to one's freedom of thought, viz: by telling you the truth on certain matters of great importance, about yourself, your soul, its nature and destiny.

Liberty is not licence. Rational liberty of its very nature demands or supposes the setting of limits. Political liberty, for example, consists in checking the freedom of action of particular individuals in order to secure the greater liberty of the general body of citizens. Your liberty to walk the streets of Melbourne, or travel the roads of Victoria without danger of being robbed or murdered, presupposes that the liberty of action of thieves and cut-throats is held in check by salutary fear of the police. A man who is a victim to some passion or vice (e.g., the vice of drink) is no longer free, he is a slave to this passion. To enjoy true liberty of soul his freedom to drink as much as he pleases must be held in check. Freedom in one particular direction must be limited to secure the higher liberty of the soul.

So it is with freedom of thought. True liberty of thought does not mean unhindered scope of speculation: but it means such a respect for and submission to the truth as will secure to the intellect the fullest use of its powers to contemplate truth already attained, and investigate truth more fully where still undiscovered.

The Free-thinker is carried away by a passion for speculation, and just like other passions (drink or sensuality) this passion, too, blinds the mind and hinders it in the search after truth.

But we said above that other influences also may hinder liberty of thought, viz: emotions such as fear, hatred, love.

Now, we may enumerate here three headings that will help us in discussing this matter, viz: superstition, fanaticism, and blind reverence for authority.

Superstition is a blind, unreasoning fear of, or reverence for, unknown forces, which may cause the mind to shrink from investigating or discovering the truth, through dread of evil consequences. Thus, pagan idolatry has blinded men's minds for ages, owing to their superstitious dread of incurring unknown disasters by refusing worship to senseless idols.

Again, too great love or partiality for a person, an institution, a theory, an idea, may also hinder the mind from attaining the truth. The old saying has it, that "Love is blind." We shrink from accepting conclusions which run counter to the affection of the soul: and so we turn away from and refuse to listen to arguments that might bring home the unwelcome truth to us. It is thus—I may say in passing—that many are hindered from acknowledging the claims of the Catholic Church, viz.: as the result of prejudice, bias in favor of Protestantism, fear of offending one's relations, dread of financial losses or else too great love of money or of one's family or of public opinion. All these things do really at times fetter the intellect and hinder the perception of truth.

FORCE OF AUTHORITY

In the third place, we may enumerate as an influence that sways the mind in the search after truth—undue reverence for authority. It is well known how powerful an influence is exercised in the world of thought by a great name. We are all instinctively hero-worshippers. Men love to follow a leader, and once a man's reputation is established (whether deservedly or undeservedly) then his influence in forming the opinions of the multitudes may be almost incalculable. One has but to instance men like Francis Bacon, Pascal, Kant, Darwin, Goethe. These and hundreds of others are looked upon as "Leaders of Thought," and because the majority of men find it easier to accept ready-made conclusions than to think for themselves, this magic influence exercised by a great name tends to hinder liberty of thought. Was it not the German poet Goethe, who refused to study Shakespeare deeply, lest the influence of the master mind acting upon himself might cramp or destroy his own originality?

Fashion holds sway in the intellectual thoroughfares of the world no less than on the streets of our cities: it dictates the shape of men's opinions no less than the cut of their clothes. Need I illustrate this matter further? In politics, for example, how few men think for themselves? One man often does the thinking for his party, the rest follow like sheep. Or take philosophy: it is hardly an exaggeration to say that philosophy as a science for the discovery of truth has almost ceased to exist at many of our modern universities. It is little more than a record of the opinions of past thinkers arranged more or less methodically, classified and criticized. As for any genuine effort to grapple with the problems that lie at the base of our existence, there is little or none. It is much the same in literature, art, history, social science. Everywhere the authority of a few sways and molds the minds of the many.

IS THE CHURCH GUILTY?

We have now described some of the influences which may tend to hinder the mind in its pursuit of truth: and our purpose is to examine whether those influences are at work in the case of Catholicism. That is, we want to find out if the charge made against Catholicism, that it tends to fetter or enslave the intellect and destroy freedom of thought, can be traced to any of those causes which I have enumerated. We will enquire, then, in the first place: Does Catholicism encourage superstition, and thereby hinder the white light of truth from reaching the minds of her children?

In the second place, is the Church's influence baleful and crippling because of the prejudice in her favor—the blind infatuation or fanaticism which she manages to inspire into her children? Or, in the third place, does she lay undue stress on her own authority, insisting that her subjects accept the doctrines she teaches without murmur or comment?

Now, you all well know that our enemies constantly ascribe the blighting influence of the Church of Rome (as they call it) to just those three things. They say she encourages superstition, which darkens the mind; she

encourages fanaticism, which renders men deaf to reason; and she insists on servile submission to her authority, which paralyzes initiative and kills individuality.

Now in the series of lectures which will take place in this hall every Monday night, various aspects of this charge will be dealt with by the lecturers. It is my province tonight merely to sketch in outline the nature of the attack that has been made on us, and to indicate a few lines of thought that may lead to a solution.

THE CHARGE OF SUPERSTITION

And first, with regard to the charge of superstition. If you ask in what way Catholics are superstitious, you get the answer: by believing in the efficacy of the Sacraments, by assisting at Mass, by accepting the doctrine of the Real Presence, and bowing down in reverence before the Blessed Sacrament; or, again, by honoring the statutes and images of the Saints, by taking holy water, and so on.

Now, let us consider this subject a little. Superstition in the popular sense means an unreasoning attributing of special power or influence to objects which in themselves are incapable of such influence. Examples of this are familiar to all.

Now, the first remark I make is this: superstition cannot for long resist reason. Once the light of learning and scientific research is brought to play upon superstition, it withers up as surely as the dew evaporates under the rays of the blazing sun. In order to test gold, men apply a mixture of strong acids which no inferior metal can resist. The fact that a metal remains unaffected by the acid test is taken as conclusive that the metal is genuine, and no mere imitation.

Now, I assert that the Catholic Church has stood this acid test of reason applied in every shape for century after century without showing signs of corrosion. Other Christian sects have succumbed to the corroding influences of Rationalism. It is not uncharitable to assert, it is merely the simple truth that the sects outside the Catholic Church today are moth-eaten with modernism, i. e., with views about religion which are subversive of all true belief

in the supernatural. But in the Catholic Church loyalty to her doctrines, belief in the efficacy of her Sacraments, intense faith in the presence of Jesus in the Eucharist, are just as strong today as they were a thousand years ago.

THE TRAINING OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Superstition can only flourish where ignorance prevails; men can cling to superstition only when they are blind to facts. But in no religious system have the difficulties been discussed and examined so thoroughly and systematically as in the Catholic Church. The men who are most responsible for the public advocacy of Catholicism are just the men who have studied most deeply the difficulties of the system, viz.: the bishops and priests of the Catholic Church. Do you know what a priest's training is like? After the usual school curriculum is completed a student for the priesthood must devote at least six years, sometimes seven or more, to a constant and laborious study of the whole system of thought on which Catholicism rests. And those years are years of strenuous study. Do not think it means cramming a student with ready-made formulae or definitions. On the contrary, the system is peculiarly one of training by question and answer. I think I am safe in saying that no system has been so carefully elaborated for training men to think and examine and probe problems to the very core as the scholastic system followed in training Catholic theological students.

So true is this, that when our enemies want to get strong difficulties against the Catholic Church they often go to her own theological manuals to find them, and there they do find long lists of difficulties, which they calmly appropriate and dish up as newly-discovered proofs of the rottenness of "the Romish system." They forget to tell their listeners that St. Thomas and a host of other theologians have demolished those difficulties ages ago.

Let me say a word of my own experiences as a student of philosophy and theology. I suppose they are the experiences of most of our students. I started the study of philosophy with the intention of finding out the truth, so far as it is attainable, about the problems of life and existence which confront every man in this puzzle of a world.

I wanted to get to the bottom of things. I had no wish to be fooled. Now I am inclined to think that those hostile to the Church and those who accuse her of obscurantism, and imagine she wants to blind the intellect, would be surprised to see how freely and frankly every objection against religion and against the Church is proposed and urged in the schools.

There is no shirking of facts. We Catholics do not want to live in a fool's paradise and find out in the end that we have been blinding ourselves to the truth. No, we are out to learn what is the Truth. We have nothing to gain by backing up a lie. And, personally, I may say that few things have strengthened my faith so much as reading carefully the books written against the Church of Rome. The attacks therein contained are so futile that they help to show forth the strength of the Church's position which they are meant to demolish.

THE CHURCH WELCOMES THE LIGHT

I repeat, then: the Catholic Church does not shrink from the light; she welcomes the light, and seeks ever more and more to have her doctrines illuminated by close study and research, knowing well that deeper knowledge will only serve to increase love and reverence for her doctrines. Therefore, her system is not superstition. Superstition cannot thrive in the sunshine of scientific investigation. But Catholicism has thriven most vigorously in the souls of men whose souls were steeped in the splendor of the light of science and knowledge.

Was it superstition, think you, that made the greatest general of modern times, Marshal Foch, kneel before the Blessed Sacrament and worship Our Lord, really present in the Eucharist, every morning before he went forth to lead the armies of the Allies to splendid victory? Was it superstition that made Pasteur, the prince of modern scientists, ambition the faith of a Breton peasant? Was it superstition that caused Sir Thomas More, the learned Chancellor, to lay his head gaily on the block rather than deny the Pope's supremacy at the bidding of Henry VIII of England? Is it superstition that inspires millions of the world's brightest and best and most gifted intellects to submit to all the doctrines of the Catholic Church as

the very truth of God revealed supernaturally to the world for its acceptance on God's authority by an act of faith? Surely, to call the religion of such men by the debasing name of superstition is a terrible abuse of language, and can only be the fruit of deep-seated jealousy or inveterate blindness or bitter sectarianism.

THE CHARGE OF FANATICISM

The second influence which we referred to above as a possible hindrance to proper freedom of thought is fanaticism. Are Catholics led on by some blind infatuation or devotion or affection to give up their power of thinking and follow the road of unreason?

This could only be (I take it) if the Church made her appeal to sentiment or the feelings and emotions instead of to reason.

To anyone who knows Catholic theology such a charge is incredibly foolish. Why, the striking characteristic of Catholic theology is just the stern way it excludes feeling or sentiment and applies pure intellect to the things of Faith: weighing every doctrine in the balance of reason and allowing only those doctrines which are clearly shown by Scripture or tradition to be part of Christ's Revelation, to be acknowledged as belonging to the deposit of faith. A striking example in confirmation of this is the vigorous and drastic way in which the Catholic Church rose up and threw off Modernism about twenty years ago.

MODERNISM

Why did the Church reject Modernism? Just because Modernists tried to establish faith on some other foundation than reason. Modernists appealed to a certain special interior sense whereby we grasp the Divine, a sort of instinct for God whereby the soul reaches out and grasps Him, though not through the intellect. Once the soul has thus dimly apprehended the Divine, then the intellect endeavors to express this experience in its own language and so you get dogmas: which are merely an effort to express in intellectual terms what is really inexpressible: like a blind man trying to talk about light or color, of which he has no genuine concept.

As she rejected Modernism in our own days, and cast

out many Modernists from her Communion, so she has in past ages consistently rejected sentimentalism, pseudo-mysticism and all forms of religious teaching which appeal not to the intellect but to the emotions.

PRIVATE JUDGMENT

But it is sometimes said that the Catholic Church kills "private judgment." That statement may mean either of two things. If it means that the Church knows very well that every individual is liable to err and needs to have his conclusions checked and controlled by constant reference to the collective intellect of the Church, the statement is true. But then the same principle applies to all bodies of men clubbed together for the discovery of truth. The conclusions of the individual scientist, philosopher, investigator, have all to be submitted to the collective wisdom of other kindred minds before those conclusions become current in the world's markets as genuine coin. That is after all the supreme safeguard of truth in all departments of human inquiry. It is one of the fine results of social intercourse and of the incessant interchange of ideas which civilization renders possible, that the findings of the individual thinker are forever being tested by the scrutiny of the student minds of the whole world.

But if, on the other hand, by private judgment you mean the right or privilege of each individual to examine and test for himself the argument for Catholicism as a whole, or the grounds for asserting that each individual doctrine is really a part of the Divine deposit of Faith, then no association in the world gives such freedom of private judgment as the Catholic Church. And the reason is, the Catholic Church is not afraid of investigation—she welcomes the closest scrutiny of her doctrine and teachings: she is not afraid lest her house should topple down because she knows it is founded on a Rock.

When inquirers come to us from outside, they are often astonished at the reception they get, especially if they have been educated on the staple diet that is administered in most Protestant households when dealing with the Catholic Church. For such inquirers are invariably told: "You must read, examine, investigate the claims of the Church for yourself, and then if you feel convinced, we will see about receiving you." We do, of course, insist much on

the importance and value of Divine Faith: but in the preliminary stages of inquiry as to where the true Church is to be found, and about all the historical questions connected with the founding and development of the Catholic Church, the inquirer has to use his own reasoning powers, he has to think for himself: i.e., he must use his own private judgment to decide about the claims of Catholicism.

Surely, if we Catholics wanted to suppress private judgment, we would not invite sensible people like you to come to listen to our arguments week after week in this hall. What else can we appeal to, to show that our religion is right but your private judgment?

SPIRITISM

There are, indeed, other bodies or sects which make an appeal that is not an appeal to sound reason or judgment, e.g., a spiritistic seance does not appeal to reason; it appeals to the love of the occult and mysterious that is latent in every human heart; or to that hankering to get into touch with the dead which has in all ages led men to dabble in necromancy: or finally, to the vulgar craving for novelty or for sensation and thrills which is responsible for so much of our modern displays in picture-shows, theatres, and music halls. Now Catholicism makes no appeal to any of these things—it appeals to that Supreme Arbiter which sits as the final court of decision in all man's investigations into his own being and surroundings, namely, human reason.

Every doctrine then must be tested by reason; and in the lectures of the second part of our program this year, certain specific teachings of the Catholic Church which usually create difficulties will be examined at length and in detail by successive lecturers.

So far we have dealt with the charges of superstition and fanaticism as influences whereby Catholicism is supposed to fetter the intellect. Now let us take a third ground of accusation. It is asserted often that the Catholic Church insists too strongly on the principle of authority in Religion, imposing her doctrines authoritatively and dogmatically on her subjects and allowing no dissent from her teaching: and ruthlessly excommunicating any one who dares to call in question any tenet which she regards as fundamental. Hence the charge against her of being

intolerant, narrow-minded, exclusive, and imperious.

Now, if there is one attitude more characteristic than another of the modern world, we might single out its tendency to defy or set aside authority especially when that authority seems to interfere with liberty or licence of speculation.

In certain departments men still recognize the function and the necessity of authority, e.g., as the binding force that holds the social fabric together, although even here there are daring speculators who would get rid of all authority and substitute anarchy for order in the civil state; and as a result of those anarchial theories, the deference due to authority has been grievously weakened both in the family, the school and the State.

AUTHORITY

But I am dealing now with authority in matters of the intellect as shaping, molding, suggesting our views, beliefs, and convictions. Now the charge made against the Catholic Church is that she has developed abnormally this principle of authority, with the result that her doctrinal system is a cast-iron one, which the believer must don like a set of armor of the Middle Ages: and that the effect of putting on this cumbersome intellectual outfit is that one's powers of thinking for oneself are as restrained and as awkward as were the movements of David when he tried to walk in the armor of Saul.

And I know (and perhaps you also know), that many thinking men are turned away from Catholicism by this way of viewing her system. A prominent journalist in London, writing not long ago about the conversion of Gilbert K. Chesterton, made the remark that he (the writer) could not dream of submitting to Catholicism because he respected his individual intellectual liberty too much and would not place his conscience in the keeping of any man, either Pope or prelate!

Now, with regard to this position: in the first place, I think a good deal of the force of the objection comes from the terms in which it is stated. To talk of a cast-iron system, fettering the intellect and so on, has a rather alarming effect: it suggests being thrust against one's will into an intellectual dungeon, hand-cuffed and manacled, without liberty to breathe or think.

But ask Catholics if they feel imprisoned or fettered by the doctrine they believe. After all, truth, if it is really the truth, is, in a sense, a cast-iron thing which you cannot twist and bend as you please. You have simply to accept it. Still, there is no more hardships in having to submit to the truth than in having to take your dinner because you are hungry, or going to sleep because you are tired. The mind needs its food as the body does. A man might say "I prefer to do without food," or "I prefer to dine off tin tacks, or brass buttons, or chunks of granite; it is a terrible nuisance having always to absorb digestible, nourishing stuff like bread and milk, sausages and pork pie." No man in his senses kicks against the law that prescribes certain definite chemical combinations (called foodstuffs), as just those things and only those that the body must assimilate to support its life. Well, truth is the foodstuff of the intellect, and without it the intellect will perish.

But secondly, we admit that authority is a central principle in the Catholic system. Those that object to this really forget the place that authority holds in every educational system. The normal road to follow in acquiring knowledge is authority.

THE CHURCH A WITNESS

But in the particular subject with which the Church has to deal, viz: Revealed truth, to be handed on from generation to generation and thus preserved for mankind, the authority of the witness must hold the first place. In pure science, although the authority of the teacher counts for much in the initial stages, still when the student is proficient he can investigate for himself, and become himself an independent authority to others. But take history, for example, and see how different a part authority plays there. All historical knowledge depends on the authority of the witnesses who give us information about past ages or past transactions. If you refuse to accept the authority, i. e., to believe the testimony of historical writers of the past, then history ceases to have any meaning for you. All our knowledge of all past human events depends on the evidence of the eye-witnesses of those

events who have confided their knowledge to writing or else handed it on by oral tradition.

DOGMATISM OR HISTORY

Hence, it would be simply absurd to object to a lecturer on history: "Sir, you lay too much stress on authority, you want me to accept the evidence of dead people of whom I know nothing, how can I trust them? I prefer to be a Free-thinker, to have freedom of thought with regard to the past. I refuse to be shackled by your positive decrees. You insist on my believing e.g., that Julius Cæsar was killed by Brutus in B.C. 44, that William the Conqueror landed in Hastings in 1066, and so on. You are too authoritative, too positive, too dogmatic in your statements. You are fettering my intellect. I will have nothing to say to you."

Well now it is just as reasonable to object to the Church that she stresses her authority. What else can she do? Her method and system are historical inasmuch as her claim to be the Church founded by Christ must be established and tested by historical methods. She is a witness and claims to hold in her keeping Christ's message to mankind: and to have His authority to promulgate that message to the world from age to age.

MARK OF A TRUE WITNESS

To those who look at the matter in the right way the fact that the Church is so strong in claiming authority as Christ's mouthpiece is a clear and definite sign that she is in very truth that which she claims to be; for the one quality we require in a truthful witness is his steadfast insistence on the truth of the facts he narrates. If a witness wavers, hesitates, shows signs of doubting, we immediately wonder whether he is telling the truth. The one quality of all others which we should expect to find prominent in a body that has really Divine Authority to teach truth to the world is that quality of authoritativeness, which is so marked a characteristic of the Catholic Church, as it was also of Jesus Christ Himself. "He spoke as one having authority."

Is it not just the want of authority shown in Christian sects outside the Catholic Church that impresses people so badly and leads them so often to realize that those sects

cannot really be Christ's representatives? Converts have repeatedly borne testimony to this.

But my argument at present is not exactly that the Church is authoritative because historic, but I quote history as an analogy. Just as historians must appeal to authority as the whole source of information in their department; and yet no one thinks his mind is fettered by submitting to the authority of history; on the contrary, we feel our minds expanding and developing under the influence of the truth which history conveys to us: and which reaches us through the channel of authority. So the Church conveys her truths to us by virtue of her authority as God's mouthpiece and no one who understands the facts thinks himself in any way enslaved or fettered by submitting to that authority and learning from the Church the truths which she claims to teach. On the contrary, the best witnesses tell us of the wonderful expansion and elevation of soul, the great broadening and uplifting of the intellect which result from its acceptance of the doctrines of Catholicism and from careful study of those doctrines and assimilation of them, especially by meditation and prayer.

For the Church encourages in every way the deep and careful study of that deposit of Revelation committed to her keeping by her Founder.

The Catholic Obscurantist

REV. T. I. MULCAHY, S.J.

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ONE of the more common charges preferred against Catholicism, and especially against Catholics, is that of obscurantism. It is often insinuated, more or less politely, that the average Catholic possesses an intelligence not far removed from that of primitive man and that his religious liberty is as broad as was the civic liberty of the galley slave. There is an element of praise in all this, for it is elicited from observers puzzled by an amazing unity of doctrine and action which they dislike because they cannot understand. It must make sad reflection for those who believe in the evolution of religious instincts when they remember that Catholicism in the

twentieth century puts forward claims as absolute as it did in the first, that Pius the Alpine climber is as "obscurantist" as Peter the fisherman. All the popular objections to Catholicism may be reduced to an *argumentum ad hominem*: "What do you know about it, anyway?" It sounds frightfully dogmatic and is frightfully true that the Catholic has but one answer: "We know all about it." One can understand how Catholicism gets on the nerves of the professional pessimist or agnostic. But one of the outstanding facts of our generation of skepticism and irreligion is the number of intellectuals in many lands who, tortured or annoyed by the amazing confidence of Catholicism, have dared to ask the reason why, have succumbed to the logic of its reason and the beauty of its traditions, and have become most dogmatic defenders of a faith whose greatest fault in the eyes of its enemies is its dogmatism.

Something of the life-story of a few of these intellectuals will be related in a series of articles to appear in these pages. It will be remarked how diverse are the subjective philosophies of these converts and sons of the Church, how deeply the men themselves differ in education and character and yet, children of many nations, they have come to love the Catholic Church as the mother of all living, and the sole guardian of objective, truth. Perhaps there lies some deep significance in the fact that it is those only who accept Catholicism as their faith who are called converts. We do not call that man a convert who elects to become a Buddhist, a Latter Day Saint or a Plymouth Brother. We conceive of him simply as drifting into these states. But it is the King's English to speak of converts to Catholicism. The non-Catholic sects publish statistics as to the increase or decrease of their numbers, but they never suggest that they have increased their numbers by converting people. A man who becomes a Catholic is called a convert because he has been convinced by Catholicism. The Catholic Church in England has been able to announce that in 1923 it made over 11,000 converts because it knows that, before accepting a man as a Catholic, it had—in common sense and according to its laws—to convince him. That is why the simple newspaper announcement of a man's conversion to Catholicism

causes so much joy or hate—as the case may be—for all the world knows that a man becomes a convert to Catholicism only because he has been convinced by Catholicism.

Catholicism is not a racial religion, the creed of a caste, the eclectic philosophy of some exclusive coterie. It has received from its Founder the express command to teach all nations and one of its divine marks is, indeed, its Catholicity. Its mission is to become the religion of the world and so to save the world. And thus we find its doctrines appealing to all nations, to all classes of society, to all temperaments and intellects. And it has always been so. Its first pope was Peter, the illiterate Fisherman from Galilee. Its first great apostle was the intellectual Roman Paul, fresh from a Greek-speaking university. The divine light of faith lit up the lonely watches of those fishermen disciples, as it shed its rays on Joseph and Nicodemus conning the rolls of the Talmud. So, too, in the twentieth century. Kings and peasants, savants and serfs, poets and politicians rank as equals in the army of Christ. In this only world Church are found "all the mysticism of the North, the patience of the East, the joyful confidence of the South, the fearless enterprise of the West." Its founder is not only a King but a Redeemer and a Friend. He is the Divine Physician who, from out the pharmacy of His Sacred Heart, offers the only remedies that can cure the ills of suffering mankind. His Church alone is perfectly familiar and tender with the separate soul, understands its wants, supplies its deficiencies, deals carefully with its weaknesses and sins; for His Church alone is as wide as the world, as old as the ages and as great-hearted as God.

The appeal which the fact of the Church's unity and Catholicity must, of necessity, make, is well illustrated in the accounts of particular conversions which are to follow. Ernest Psichari, in his dream-times roaming the uncharted spaces of Moroccan deserts, has borne in upon him the breadth of skies and the depth of silence and finds no answer to his eager questioning save the mocking cynicism of the mirage. His Gallic mind rebels against this denial of order, unity and stability in the world. This world of ours must contain, as it certainly merits, an explanation. And in his quest of unity there comes the

appeal of a religion which professes that a spirit does indeed breathe over the waters, that a voice has come out of the skies and silence with a message of hope: "This is my beloved Son; hear ye Him." He sees the Catholic Church clothed in the traditions of centuries, the founder of the Latin order and civilization which he cherished, the soul of his country's greatness, but also the mystic body of Christ, the teacher and the savior of the world.

And Giovanni Papini, that scorner of convention, the man who would not tolerate the world, roaming with a prodigious impatience through the wide worlds of literature and philosophy, seeing with flaming torch a truth which would save him from the world! That truth he finds in Catholicism: for the Catholic is one who must be in the world but not of it. Ferdinand Brunetière, who is the inspiration of the French Catholic intellectuals of our generation, became a Catholic because, believing that the human intellect is the faculty which initiates and controls the actions of man, he realized that it becomes inept for its purpose, unless it be sure of its starting point and its end, unless man knows his origin and his ultimate destiny.

In these chaotic years when a world is witnessing the hollowness of ideals that are merely human and the impotence of man to inspire the Divine gift of peace without invoking the God of whose breath it is, the need of authority is becoming daily more evident to a world that has renounced it. How many men live a moral life if there does not exist an universally recognized code of morality? Does the fact of victory in war justify the victors in formulating their own ideas of justice and mercy? If Christ be the Son of God and Founder of a religious system, how may all the diverse sects of Christianity claim heritage to that Divine legacy? To a distraught world, Catholicism speeds this message of peace and hope, a message delivered to it nineteen hundred years ago and proclaimed with unfaltering utterance all the ages between: Christ is the Son of God and the Founder of Catholicism: "And behold I am with you in all ages, even to the end of the world." As the infallible exponent of its Master's teaching and morality, it tenders to all that suffer in all ages the invitation of mercy that wells up from out the depths of His love: "Come to me all you that suffer and are heavily burthened."